

VZCZCXRO1968  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHRA #0521/01 1941320  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 131320Z JUL 07  
FM AMEMBASSY RIGA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4180  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000521

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [CVIS](#) [NATO](#) [LG](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BAILEY'S FIRST MEETING WITH PRESIDENT  
ZATLERS

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey. Reason: 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Only three days on the job, President Zatlers received Ambassador Bailey on July 11. The new President stressed his desire to continue strong bilateral relations with the US, as Latvia's strategic partner. The Ambassador reviewed the many areas of bilateral military, political, and economic cooperation, and the President seemed impressed by the scope of our relations. He expressed a desire to make an early trip to Afghanistan, which the Ambassador pledged our support to facilitate. The President also emphasized the importance of being as open as possible about developments in the relationship, especially visas, so that people had the most information possible. In a separate one on one meeting, the Ambassador stressed the importance we attach to transparency and urged the President to be a "moral compass" for Latvia. She also encouraged him to develop a strong action plan for his first 100 days in office. In press remarks afterwards, the Ambassador expressed her opinion that Latvia "is in good hands" with President Zatlers. End summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Bailey had her first meeting with new Latvian President Valdis Zatlers on July 11, just three days in to his term of office, at Riga Castle. The Ambassador, joined by A/DCM and DATT, met with the President, accompanied by his Chief of Staff Edvards Stiprais, Foreign Policy Advisor Andris Pelss, and Press Secreatry Inta Lase, for nearly 30 minutes. The Ambassador and President then met one on one for an additional 25 minutes. This was followed by a joint press availability.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador opened the meeting by presenting President Zatlers the congratulatory letter from President Bush and copies of the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence. She stressed her great pleasure at being received so early in the President's tenure, stressed the strong bilateral relationship, and her desire for good relations between his office and the Embassy, noting we had already begun to develop good relations with his advisors. Zatlers welcomed the Ambassador's introduction and desire to build close ties. He stressed his desire to work with the US as Latvia's strategic partner and to build close ties to the Embassy. He stressed that his inaugural address (which included strong mention of the transatlantic link) was a good statement of his policy. He added that he had chosen younger people as his advisors because he wanted to "look to the future" but added that he felt he had a strong team.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador noted that the two visits by President Bush to Riga showed the strength of the bilateral relationship. She stressed the President's commitment to the Global War on Terror and praised Latvia's contributions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, standing shoulder to shoulder with the US in meeting these threats. The Ambassador underscored that, despite political challenges at home, President Bush remained committed to ensuring global security, which will be

an important part of his legacy. She noted that there have been no attacks on American soil since 9/11.

15. (C) In this vein, she welcomed the decision by Zatlers to pay an early visit to NATO (July 17) and meet with the Secretary General. She also encouraged Zatlers to make an

SIPDIS

early visit to Afghanistan, which would be important to the troops. She offered the Embassy's assistance in helping with implementation of such a trip, if necessary. The DATT stressed the appreciation and admiration for Latvia and its military in the USG and among the US military, noting his own positive experiences working with Latvian troops in Iraq. He said his number one task was to help Latvia continue to develop a military able to serve effectively in NATO, and increased Latvian participation in ISAF was key to that. He also reinforced the benefit for troops in the field of a visit by their President. Zatlers confirmed he would visit Afghanistan as soon as possible. "This is a must," he said. Adding, "I am a man and I must serve my country. It sends an important signal to the men of Latvia about their duty." Noting that he had never been a military man himself, he did recall that he went in with the Soviet third army within ten days of the Chernobyl disaster to provide medical assistance.

16. (C) The Ambassador next reviewed our bilateral economic relations, stressing the importance that President Bush attached to them. After reviewing recent American investments and Embassy trade promotion activities, she noted the need to increase awareness of Latvia among American investors and said this will be a key task for new Ambassador to Washington Andrejs Pildegovics. Ambassador Bailey noted also that the Latvian trade office in Washington needs to lift its game. She outlined a plan to lead a large delegation of Latvian officials to the US in October to look

RIGA 00000521 002 OF 002

at tourism, economic development, culture and architecture. The Ambassador also reviewed the recent successful energy conference organized by Embassy Riga and stressed that energy was a good area for bilateral cooperation. The Ambassador also reviewed the state of play on efforts to expand the visa waiver program.

17. (C) At the Ambassador's request, A/DCM reviewed recent events in the banking sector, stressing that this was not a USG action, but driven by commercial and regulatory concerns of the banks and highlighting that one bank had decided to delay a planned closure of correspondent accounts. He also underscored that Latvia, even as a small state, had an important voice in NATO, which operates by consensus. A/DCM continued that Latvia's efforts at democracy promotion in places like Georgia and Moldova were important and welcomed in Washington. He encouraged the President to continue to share Latvia's successful experiences with other transition states.

18. (C) Responding both to the comments on visas and on the banking sector, President Zatlers said that it was important to speak openly on such things, even if they are sometimes sensitive, to control rumors. Noting that the Latvian government often does not do a good job of informing people of what it is doing, he urged the Ambassador to provide more and regular updates of issues like the visa waiver program expansion so people understood what was going on. Describing his own character as "decisive," Zatlers said that in the modern world people expect instant decisions. "If you send a letter yesterday, people expect an answer today." But, he said, that was not always possible, especially in bureaucracies. He added that what mattered more was what you decide rather than when you decide.

19. (C) In the one on one meeting that followed, the Ambassador stressed to the President the need to be "a moral compass" for Latvia. While saying he would necessarily be

different than President Vike-Freiberga, she stressed that the President could model certain of her traits without copying. In that regard, she stressed our great concern with efforts earlier this year to amend the laws on oversight of the security institutions, and expressed great concern at the Prime Minister's dismissal of our concerns. The President was very interested in hearing a complete accounting of those concerns and events. The Ambassador also underscored the great importance we attach to transparency and efforts to fight corruption.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador stressed to the President the importance of his first 100 days in office, encouraging him to use his background as a physician to focus on health care. The President agreed that this was a priority for him, but he was still considering what specific part would be the best place for him to begin. Commenting on the scandals he faced about receiving gratuities from patients, the President said that he had submitted draft legislation several years ago to regularize this practice and bring it in to the open, but the government of the day declined to move on it. (Note: The Danish Ambassador, Dean of the Riga Diplomatic Corps told Ambassador Bailey that the President had made the same claim in his introductory meeting as well. End note.)

¶11. (U) In the press availability that followed, the Ambassador said that Latvia was "in good hands" with President Zatlers and compared him to Senator Bill Frist as a physician entering politics. Zatlers expressed his desire for continued strong relations with the United States.  
BAILEY